

7 March 1986

**ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE C-9**

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Hearing feels heat from Baker

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

WASHINGTON—

Normally unflappable Treasury Secretary James Baker lost his temper yesterday during a clash with a congressman and admonished the lawmaker: "I don't come up here to get yelled at."

Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.) pressed Baker, whose department oversees the Customs Service, to act more forcefully, under the 1930 Tariff Law, to ban imports from countries that engage in slave labor, notably the Soviet Union.

At first Baker noncommittally said the issue was under "active review" but "it is a multifaceted issue...and not a one-country specific question."

He expressed concern that lack of evidence would jeopardize chances of winning such a case in court.

Wolf exploded: "Bring a case! Lose it! Bring a case and see... The CIA people will tell you there is proof. Your people know there's proof."

Plainly irked, Baker responded: "The CIA will tell you there's proof, congressman, and then they won't let you use it."

Wolf accused Baker of "shirking your responsibility." Baker shot back: "I don't plan to bring a case if I get shouted at one more time by you."

When Wolf repeated his demand Baker responded: "I don't come up here to get yelled at... I'll be the judge of what my obligation is and you won't. You just took five steps backward."